



LENNY GILMORE/REDEYE

Wednesday
DECEMBER 30, 2015

★ **FREE** ★

A Chicago Tribune
publication

from sleeping in a car to
SOBER

**COOK COUNTY DRUG COURT PUT
KYLE HILBERT AND HUNDREDS
OF OTHERS ON THE ROAD TO
RECOVERY FROM ADDICTION 6-7**

Last Bears game—finally 8

Slurps up at Oyster Bah 12

Random movie awards 18-20

BY HEATHER SCHROERING, REDEYE | REDEYE@REDEYECHICAGO.COM » GET MORE SPONTANEOUS EAT. DRINK. DO. IDEAS AT REDEYECHICAGO.COM

EVE OF THE EVE BLACKOUT BALL

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Stretch Bar & Grill



Untitled Supper Club

EVE OF THE EVE

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'The Naughty List: A Holiday Sketch Revue'

'THE NAUGHTY LIST: A HOLIDAY SKETCH REVUE'

The Annoyance Theatre & Bar
851 W. Belmont Ave. 773-697-9693
A hallucinogenic experience during Thanksgiving dinner and sexual role play between Mr. and Mrs. Claus are just two of the naughty sketches in this show by Huggable Riot that looks at the trials of the holiday season. 8-9:15 p.m. \$10-\$12. Tickets: theannoyance.com

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3-DAY FORECAST



WEDNESDAY

33 28

Flurries



THURSDAY

30 24

New Year's Eve



FRIDAY

25 18

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Chi-Town Rising will bring fireworks, musical stages and other attractions to an area along the Chicago River between Michigan Avenue and Columbus Drive on New Year's Eve.

big picture



A BALL, A PEEP, A POTATO DROP ON NYE, BUT IN CHICAGO A STAR RISES

By Kori Rumore and Jemal R. Brinson
CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Chicago is joining the ranks of cities including New York City and Atlanta as it prepares to usher in 2016 by lowering, or in this case raising, a giant symbol at the stroke of midnight. The six-pointed Chicago star differs from other notable New Year's Eve symbols in that it will rise over the festivities of Chi-Town Rising on the side of the Hyatt Regency downtown as midnight approaches. All of the others drop. The other noteworthy difference in the City of Big Shoulders is that Chicago's star, at 70 feet, 6 inches tall, is much, much larger than any of its symbolic competition. Here's a look at the star's New Year's Eve siblings from around the U.S.

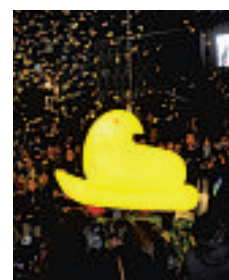


▲ TIMES SQUARE BALL

City: New York City

Size: 12 feet in diameter

Description: This year's version of the ball, which has been the symbol of this city's Times Square New Year's Eve celebration since 1907, is covered with 2,688 Waterford Crystal triangles that vary in size. It is illuminated by 32,256 LED lights—8,064 of each in red, blue, green and white. The ball's descent begins at 11:59 p.m. Eastern and ends at midnight.



▲ PEEP

City: Bethlehem, Pa.

Size: 4.5 feet tall

Description: As part of an annual two-day New Year's Eve festival, an 85-pound lit Peeps chick descends at 5:15 p.m. Eastern.



▲ POTATO

City: Boise, Idaho

Size: 17 feet tall by 8 feet wide

Description: For the third consecutive year, an 800-pound potato, which is made of foam and resin attached to a steel frame, will be lowered from a crane. New this year, the massive potato will be lowered in a park in front of Idaho's Capitol building.

SOURCE: TRIBUNE REPORTING. ALL HANDOUT IMAGES EXCEPT FOR THE PEEP, WHICH IS BY DONNA FISHER/THE MORNING CALL

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of Railroad Earth
NEW YEAR'S DAY BRUNCH
SHOW

1/1 8 PM Lynne Jordan
& the Shivers

1/3 Pokey LaFarge
SPECIAL SOLO SHOW
WITH JACK GRELE

1/10 The Bad Plus 7 PM

1/15 Peter Mulvey, Paul
Cebal, & Willy Porter

1/17 5PM Del McCoury Band

1/17 8PM Del McCoury Band
with Jeff Austin Band

1/18 Syleena Johnson

1/19 Kaki King THE NECK
IS A BRIDGE TO THE BODY

1/20 Davina & the
Vagabonds WITH
SPECIAL GUEST LUKE WADE

1/22 The Westlies WITH WILL
KIMBROUGH (CD RELEASE
SHOW) 8PM

1/23 Greg Brown

1/24 1PM Ian Maksin WITH
CORKY SIEGEL

1/24 8 PM Sons of the
Never Wrong WITH
MICHAEL P. SMITH

1/28-30 Alejandro Escovedo

1/31 Alan Doyle Band

2/1-2 Jake Shimabukuro

2/3 Wynonna & the Big
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A screengrab from the dating website MouseMingle.com.

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Could this be the dating site with a happy ending?



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It's almost 2016—if you're still single, you're doing it wrong. Niche online dating services can narrow your focus down so specifically that you never, ever have to get naked again with anyone who isn't a farmer, a cat enthusiast or a dude with a cool beard.

And yet, no one had prioritized the most important trait of all—how hot you are for Disney? Until they did. **MouseMingle.com** is designed for “adults” who are looking for that special kind of mega-corporation love. Here are our best bets for a first date that's guaranteed to get you into the happiest place on Earth: someone else's pants.

'Apple Dumpling Gang'-bang

Stay up all night getting busy—ranking every Disney film from best to worst. Turn up the passion to 11 as you violently argue the merits of “Bedknobs and Broomsticks” versus “The Three Lives of Thomasina.”

Show off in the bedroom

Treat your date to a private tour of your boudoir. Proudly brandish all your best Disney merch, like your Anna and Elsa alarm clock,

“Hunchback of Notre Dame”-brand condoms and, of course, your Darkwing Duck anatomically correct body pillow.

Go really wild

Head to your local zoo's faux-Africa environs and ogle all the little Simbas who lost their fathers and have severe daddy issues, just like you! If you see a particularly scary lion, that's Scar. Or it's very sick. Sing a sexy version of “Hakuna Matata” to a warthog if you wanna lock this thing up ... before they catch the warthog you set free and lock it back up.

Get really wet

Make like Ariel and go for a romantic, untrained under-the-deep-sea dive! Don't worry about nitrogen narcosis. The poison in your bloodstream will manifest as hallucinations of Sebastian's hot crustacean band playing “Hotline Bling.” Plus, the less oxygen your date gets, the more you look like Prince Eric.

Just go all the way

To Disney World, obvi. Disneyland will do, if you must. Want to really impress your date? Bring along a wheelchair and head right to the front of the spinning teacups line! #MatHatterSkills

So, do you wanna *bleep* a snowman, or what?

JOEL BUXTON IS A WRITER, STAND-UP AND SKETCH PERFORMER BASED IN TORONTO. FIND HIM ON TWITTER @JOELBUXTON. READ MORE AT THE SECOND CITY NETWORK.



A
Chicago Tribune
publication
redeyechicago.com

CONTACT US

Newsroom: 312-222-4970
redeye@redeyechicago.com

Advertising: 312-527-8077
advertisingredeye@tribune.com

Classifieds: 312-222-2222

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Kyle Hilbert
LENNY GILMORE/REDEYE

Recovery, then redemption

DRUG COURT HELPS ADDICTS KICK HABITS, REBUILD THEIR LIVES

By **Leonor Vivanco** | REDEYE

Kyle Hilbert spent his mornings driving around trying to score heroin or crack cocaine on the West or South sides, he says. And at night, he parked on North Side residential streets, where he'd pull out his phone and watch a movie, or try to get some sleep.

Some days he'd stop in a Starbucks bathroom to clean up—the closest he'd come to bathing himself for months at a time. He'd try to make some cash by working construction or moving jobs that he found on Craigslist. When he was strapped, he'd swipe a box of ice cream bars from the grocery store, his one

meal for the day.

He'd think about repairing his relationship with his family—broken by drugs, stealing, lies and hurt.

Then he was arrested a year ago—a familiar story in his life, at least in the past decade, when he seemed to be pushing through a revolving door of treatment and jail, the latter for drug possession and theft.

Another run-in with the law might have sent him down a familiar judicial path. But suddenly he veered away.

Instead of sitting in jail awaiting trial, he was diverted to drug court, formally known as the Cook County Rehabilitation Alternative Probation program, which has offered hundreds of Chicago-area residents like the 32-year-old Hilbert a chance to fight the addiction that seemingly feeds their need to break the law.

As governments grapple with the rising expense of jailing people and experts weigh how to best help non-violent offenders, drug courts are viewed as something that can save both tax dollars and lives.

Hilbert told RedEye last month, “My family—they call me now. It's not like they avoid my calls. They invite me to things. I can stop by on the weekends. I'm not the plague that I used to be because I don't bring my mess around them.”

Providing help, not jail time

Rather than having them rack up another conviction, and jail or prison time, the drug court program aims to put people on the road to recovery and redemption, according to Cook County Judge Charles Burns, who has overseen the program for nearly six years.

Here's how the program, started in 1998, works: Suspects plead guilty to the charge and get in-jail and outpatient treatment to help beat their addiction while on probation; jail time is taken off the table. If they successfully complete the probation program and stay clean, they get

the conviction vacated and the case dismissed. Last month, Hilbert was among two dozen people who graduated from the program in a short ceremony at the Southwest Side's Leighton Criminal Courthouse, rarely a place of joy and happiness.

ADDICTION

A YEARLONG
EXPLORATION OF
DEPENDENCY

/ADDICTION
 #ADDICTION2015

But on this day, there was cake, smiles and surprisingly hugs for Burns. The group was celebrating a graduation of sorts from the program and being drug-free.

"Is this a great day or what?" Burns said. "I know it's going to sound corny, but this is like our Christmas."

Taking a chance on someone

Defendants who violate their court-ordered probation or appear in bond court on a non-violent felony case such as drug possession or shoplifting can get referred to drug court. A criminal justice team including Burns, assistant state's attorneys, an assistant public defender and probation officers evaluates the defendant for the program.

Currently, there are close to 100 men and women in the Rehabilitation Alternative Probation program at the Chicago courthouse, according to Pat Milhizer, spokesman for the Office of the Chief Judge of the Cook County Circuit Court.

The program begins with in-custody treatment and counseling at the county jail for 120 days with the help of certified substance abuse treatment providers followed by intensive outpatient treatment at a halfway house, recovery home or sober living residence. Annually, it costs about \$1.2 million funded by state grants and probation court fees to pay for the contracts for the treatment providers for drug court countywide including suburban branches in Maywood, Markham and Bridgeview, Milhizer said.

The participants regularly attend self-help groups, like 12-step meetings. They get random drug tests. They pay court fees of \$270. They look for jobs or enroll in a GED or job training program.

In drug court, they appear before Burns

once a month for a check-in and see their case manager more often. The better they do in the program, the less frequent the contact.

About 60 days in, the judge orders everyone in the program to write a "soul-searching" letter to him about how they started using drugs, what they lost because of it and their short-term and long-term goals. It's also supposed to spell out a relapse-prevention plan.

In his letter to Burns, Hilbert's goals were to stay sober and reconnect with his family. His drug use pattern is one that is familiar for addicts. He started smoking weed at age 12, got into Vicodin at age 15 after he had den-



Judge Charles Burns
LENNY GILMORE/REDEYE

tal work and at age 19 progressed to heroin, which was cheaper than prescription drugs. Now, Hilbert goes to at least four 12-step meetings a week. He's got a sponsor and a full-time job as a welder. He's paying his bills and debts. And he moved back into his father's house in Glenview.

"Allowing me back into the house reassures me and gives me hope that they see that I'm doing the right thing, not by what I tell them, but by what I've shown them. That's the greatest change that has happened today for me," Hilbert said after the graduation ceremony.

At the ceremony, held twice a year, Burns addresses the graduates. "You are where you are because you wanted to make a change," he said.

As with anyone struggling with addiction, some relapse or even get arrested

again. When that happens, the judge will order the defendant to go back a step in the program or increase treatment or drug tests.

For those who fail the program, the judge moves ahead with sentencing the offender.

Measuring success

Recent statistics provided by the county show that 436 men and women participated in the Rehabilitation Alternative Probation program at the Leighton Criminal Court Building in Chicago from 2009 to 2013, and 49 percent completed the program successfully. When drug court in suburban Cook

County branches were factored into the equation, the overall success rate was roughly the same at 47 percent.

Those rates, court spokesman Milhizer said, are nearly identical to national drug court graduation rates.

There are 2,900 drug courts throughout the country, according to the National Association of Drug Court Professionals. An evaluation of 23 drug courts nationwide concluded that drug court participants were less likely to relapse than similar offenders who weren't diverted to drug court, according to the Justice Policy Center at the Urban Institute, RTI International and the Center for Court Innovation.

And repeat arrests and convictions go down, according to a 2013 review of the local drug court program conducted by the Cook County State's Attorney's Office.

The review showed:

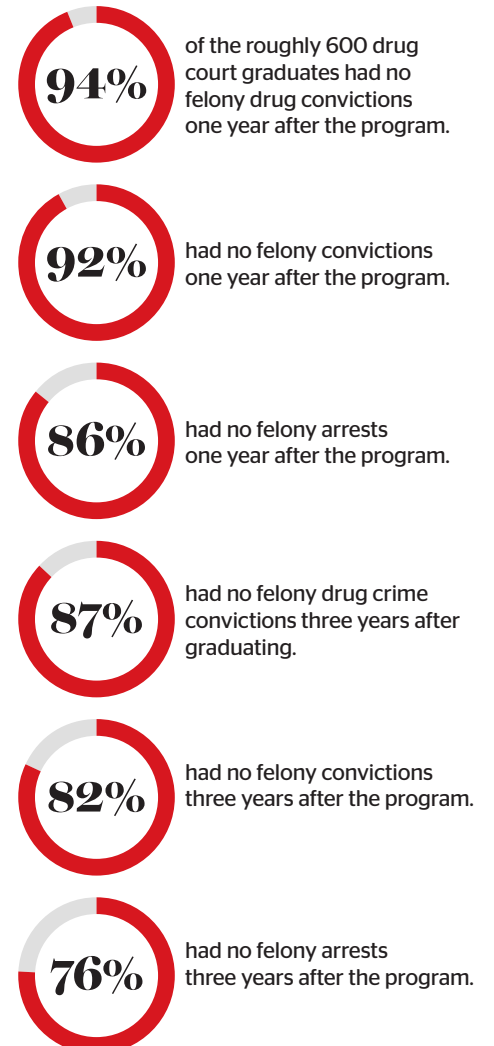
- » 94 percent of the roughly 600 drug court graduates had no felony drug convictions one year after the program.
- » 92 percent had no felony convictions one year after the program.
- » 86 percent had no felony arrests one year after the program.
- » 87 percent had no felony drug crime convictions three years after graduating.
- » 82 percent had no felony convictions three years after the program.
- » 76 percent had no felony arrests three years after the program.

'In treatment and beginning to blossom'

Judge Burns said he can see first-hand that the program is changing lives: "I see that this works. I see the significant change in people's lives. I see a person on Day 1 still high or going through a detox and [they're] dope sick. Then I see him 30 days from now in treatment and beginning to blossom. ... It's nothing short of redemption."

Progress after drug court

A 2013 review of the local drug court program by the Cook County State's Attorney's Office showed a drop in repeat arrests and convictions.



That includes Wanda Daniel.

She began using drugs when she was 17 and got hooked on cocaine and heroin over the next three decades. She ended up in Burns' courtroom in 2013, sent by another judge as she faced time in the penitentiary for heroin possession.

"They put me on the path I'm standing on now," Daniel said. "It wasn't easy by a long shot, but I knew that I didn't want to use anymore."

The West Lawn resident celebrated 18 months of sobriety and graduated from drug court last May. She regularly attends 12-step meetings and is currently looking for employment after a temporary job ended in October.

"Everything has been going well. It feels good waking up knowing that I don't have to have a drug or mind-altering chemicals to start my day."

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2015 NFL SEASON | WEEK 17

BEARS

BINGE

YOUR SEMI-SERIOUS GUIDE TO THIS WEEK'S MATCHUP

PRESENTED BY

JACK DANIEL'S
 Tennessee
 FIRE™


Bears running back Matt Forte

BRIAN CASSELLA/TRIBUNE

2 stars lost in sea of futility


Joseph Tanksley

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 team

the division. While the Lions don't have the rich history and tradition of the Bears, these two teams are a lot more alike than they are different, as they will compete to not be in last place in the NFC North.

While fans of both teams are ready to move on from abysmal seasons, there is

The final game of the Bears season is finally here, and they have an opportunity to close it out with a home victory against one of their fiercest rivals, the Detroit Lions.

This game will be a contest of two franchises that constantly struggle to make the playoffs and claim

speculation that we will have to say goodbye to fan favorites in Bears running back Matt Forte and Lions receiver Calvin Johnson. For several seasons, each has been the best player on his team.

Forte is considered the best all-around running back for his ability to run, catch and block. Johnson is one of the game's all-time greats, which can be attributed to his nearly unparalleled combination of size and speed.

Both have had to play the primes of their careers on pretty bad teams, and they might welcome an opportunity to move on to somewhere they could win a Super Bowl.

It's a shame to think the Bears and Lions squandered

the talent of great players. But both teams have histories of underachieving and flat-out bad football. At least here in Chicago the arrow is pointed up as coach John Fox and his staff have seemingly changed the culture in the Bears locker room. Detroit management, on the other hand, might be questioning if coach Jim Caldwell has what it takes to right the ship.

The Bears suffered a devastating loss to the Lions in overtime back in Week 6, a game in which both coaches made questionable decisions. Both would prefer to end 2015 on a positive note, of course. Wouldn't it be great if the Bears could finally win another one at home ...?

JOSEPH TANKSLEY IS A REDEYE CONTRIBUTOR AND FORMER DEFENSIVE BACK AT BUTLER UNIVERSITY.

Calvin Johnson
AP PHOTO

NFL Week 17 schedule

Sunday Bears	vs. Detroit	noon Fox
N.Y. Jets	at Buffalo	noon CBS
New England	at Miami	noon CBS
New Orleans	at Atlanta	noon Fox
Philadelphia	at N.Y. Giants	noon Fox
Washington	at Dallas	noon Fox
Tennessee	at Indianapolis	noon CBS
Baltimore	at Cincinnati	noon Fox
Pittsburgh	at Cleveland	noon CBS
Jacksonville	at Houston	noon CBS
Oakland	at Kansas City	3:25 p.m. Fox
San Diego	at Denver	3:25 p.m. CBS
Tampa Bay	at Carolina	3:25 p.m. Fox
Seattle	at Arizona	3:25 p.m. Fox
St. Louis	at San Francisco	3:25 p.m. CBS
Minnesota	at Green Bay	7:30 p.m. NBC

ENOUGH ALREADY

By Chris Sosa | REDEYE

Sometimes Bears fans just don't make much sense in the grand scheme of things. Here are three things we'd prefer they stop saying.

“They’re ruining their draft position.”

It's one thing to say this in jest, to find the silver lining in a season gone horribly wrong. It's another to actually be angry for players and coaches winning. Players are not paid to think about draft picks; they're out there to win every game. Mediocrity can be tough on business, sure. But do you know what's worse? Ending up like the Philadelphia 76ers.

“All they can do is play spoiler now.”

The satisfaction of knowing your rival missed the playoffs might comfort fans, but how much motivation can it really provide a pro athlete? It's not as if ruining another team's season will magically push the reset button and void the Super Bowl. One can't really expect a coach to take a “We sucked this year, but we can make the other guys feel bad!” speech into the locker room.

“Cold, snow, sleet ... that’s ‘Bear weather!’ ”

The Bears have lost five straight to Detroit, including twice at Soldier Field (one loss was last December). Clearly the Bears don't really have Mother Nature as an ally. And if I'm tailgating on Sunday, I'd take another unseasonably warm 55-degree day over 10 degrees and a blizzard any day.



Bears outside linebacker Pernell McPhee and Detroit wide receiver T.J. Jones
JOHN J. KIM/TRIBUNE FILE

THE '85 BEARS ARE HOW OLD?

ICYMI, 2015 marks the 30th anniversary of the 1985 Bears, the last team to bring a Super Bowl title to Chicago. And as anyone who has experienced it knows, turning 30 can be a pain. Each week we'll give you an idea of what Bears fans who remember the magic of 1985 must be going through.

WHEN YOU TURN 30 ... you can't wait to be 40.

Football equivalent: OK, that's a stretch in any context, unless you're Paul Rudd and you're married to Leslie Mann like in “This is 40.” Then it's probably pretty awesome. Still, you can't wait for this season to be over, if for no other reason than it means you're one day closer to seeing the Bears actually win a Super Bowl.



#LagunaPicks

Instead of recruiting a football expert to predict each Bears game, RedEye asked Laguna the Shedd Aquarium sea lion. Because it's fun.

LAGUNA'S RECORD

» 8-7 after Week 16 (he incorrectly picked Tampa Bay over the Bears last week)

SEA LION FACT

» Sea lions often congregate near the Bonneville Dam along the Washington-Oregon border, where they eat endangered species of salmon. To protect the salmon, the government began a culling program. Shedd Aquarium was one of several facilities that offered to rescue a few of the sea lions.

MORE INFO

Visit sheddaquarium.org

THIS WEEK'S PICK:

Lions over Bears

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SING IT!

Today's panelists had to use song lyrics for every one of their answers. Shine on.



Katie Gibson
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WGN producer



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Caped Sox crusader



Sara Amato
@saamato
RedEye designer



Andy Frye
@mysportscomplex
RedEye contributor



Clark Jones
@theclarkjones
Stand-up comic

1	Which sports story would you most like to leave behind in 2016?	"Go Cubs gooooo, go Cubs goooooo."	"Hey, Chicago, what do ya say, the Cubs are gonna win today."	"It's one for the Dagger ..."	"Fatal flying guillotine chops off [Ronda Rousey's] [bleepin'] head."	"Duuuuude looks like a lady."
2	Let's have your boldest College Football Playoff prediction.	"Teenage wasteland, it's only teenage wasteland. They're all wasted!"	" 'Cause the players gonna play, play, play, play, play."	"Everyone's a winner, baby, that's the truth."	"Our boys in Ohio, comin' through with the crazy, why-oh why-oh."	"Hey, hey ... ho, ho the BCS has got to go."
3	By the end of 2016, someone in Chicago sports will ...	"The time has come to be gone. And to our health we drank a thousand times, it's time to ramble on."	"... focus on me, focus on me."	"... walk 500 miles."	"Blessed since the birth, [the Bulls] earth-slam your best."	"Win, win, win no matter what!"
4	How close are the Bears to a winning season?	"I can't believe the news today. I can't close my eyes and make it go away."	"Ex's and the oh, oh, ohs they haunt me."	"Now that we're here, it's so far away."	"Across the clear blue yonder, seek the China Sea."	"Why you gotta be so ruuuuude?"
5	How close are we to seeing the Cubs win the you-know-what?	(In my best Axl Rose) "So faaaaaa away. So faaaarrrr AWAYYYY!"	"Is it too late to say I'm sorry now?"	" 'Cause all I do is win, win, win and if you goin' in put your hands in the air, make them stay there."	"If you want beet, then bring the ruckus. [Joe Maddon's boys] ain't nothin' ta [bleep] with."	"We got a really big team, and they need some really big rings."

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Lindsey Vonn sits with Tiger Woods and his children, Sam and Charlie, in April. AP FILE PHOTO

THE MOUTHWATCH

'MESSI. ... HE'S PLAYING.'

—**Charlie Woods**, 6-year-old son of Tiger Woods, to USA Today when asked whether he'd rather be his dad on the golf course or Lionel Messi on the soccer pitch. The truth hurts, even if the kid was joking (which he probably was).



GETTY IMAGES FILE

HOT DATE

JAN. 22

That's the date by which Illinois Attorney General **Lisa Madigan** has agreed to respond to fantasy sports site DraftKings' complaint filed last week. DraftKings filed a lawsuit Thursday, a day after Madigan declared daily fantasy sports betting illegal in Illinois.

STOP. WATCH.

This weekend's must-see event in sports

COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFF SEMIFINALS

Thursday on ESPN

Oklahoma vs. Clemson, 3 p.m.

Michigan State vs. Alabama, 7 p.m.

Finally, we've reached Year 2 of the playoffs, and chances are good the competition will be twice as awesome as last year. The one complaint we have: Whose idea was it to hold these games on New Year's Eve? Wouldn't it have been better to hold them Jan. 1 or 2, when much of the country would be too tired/hungover to move? Consider that for next time around, people.

ALSO ON TAP WEDNESDAY

- » Basketball: Illinois vs. Michigan, 2 p.m. ESPN2
- » Basketball: Northwestern at Nebraska, 3 p.m. ESPNU

- » Bulls vs. Indiana, 7 p.m. WGN
- » Basketball: Loyola vs. Southern Illinois, 7 p.m. CSN
- » Wolves at Rockford, 7 p.m. WCIU2
- » Basketball: DePaul vs. Georgetown, 8 p.m. Fox Sports 1

THURSDAY

- » Blackhawks at Colorado, 7 p.m. CSN
- » Basketball: Chicago State at Ball St., 1 p.m. ESPN3

FRIDAY

- » Outback Bowl: Northwestern vs. Tennessee, 11 a.m. ESPN2

THE COMPLETE NFL SCHEDULE IS ON PAGE 8.

- » Bulls vs. New York, 7 p.m. CSN

SATURDAY

- » Basketball: DePaul at Seton Hall, 10 a.m. Fox Sports 1
- » Basketball: UIC at Valparaiso, 1 p.m. CSN
- » Basketball: Loyola at Indiana State, 1 p.m. ESPN3
- » Basketball: Northwestern vs. Maryland, 7 p.m. BTN
- » Wolves vs. Rockford, 7 p.m. Allstate Arena (it's post-game skate night!)

SUNDAY

- » Bulls at Toronto, 2:30 p.m. WGN
- » Basketball: Illinois at Ohio State, 4 p.m. BTN
- » Wolves vs. Lake Erie, 4 p.m. WCIU2
- » Blackhawks vs. Ottawa, 6 p.m. CSN

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Hooked

By Michael Nagrant | FOR REDEYE

The common image of a food critic is a bitter, vindictive, monocle-wearing bon vivant, aka Anton Ego of “Ratatouille.” The truth is I eat far too many cups of instant noodles to be considered a bon vivant. I want every restaurant I try to be worthy of four stars. Who wants to suffer through a terrible meal, even if you’re getting paid for it?

Still, I have to admit that when I heard about Oyster Bah, a new Lincoln Park restaurant from Lettuce Entertain You, I had fantasies of it being subpar so I could title this piece “Oyster Bah, Humbug.” Needless to say, Lettuce founder Richard Melman, managing partner Bill Nevruz and chef Pete Balodimas didn’t go along with my plan. Instead, they’ve delivered quite the seafood restaurant.

The scene

The interior of Oyster Bah feels like Red Lobster reimagined by hipsters, which is to say there’s lots of nautical bric-a-brac: lobster pots, buoys, mounted trophy fish and old boat propellers. There’s also weathered wood throughout and a porthole-clad entrance. Surprisingly, the whole scheme doesn’t feel

like a cheesy Long John Silver’s offshoot.

The bar and some of the tables are marble-topped, while all of the tables have a mismatched assortment of used and worn chairs. There’s a cozy second concept called the Crab Cellar in the basement that serves a few different options that aren’t on the upstairs menu, such as a full order of red king crab (\$49.95). Though it’s open on a first-come, first-serve basis, the Crab Cellar, which was previously an old prep kitchen, feels hidden and clandestine, similar to The Office at The Aviary.

Balodimas attributes the overall quality of the dining room to Melman. “I’ve opened 18 restaurants, but this is the first with Lettuce. A week before opening, we’re tearing down walls, painting and repainting walls,” he said.

“It seems like madness, but then you realize it makes a huge difference. Rich [Melman] knows what works. He’s the best in the business. When it all comes together, it’s perfect. The place feels like it’s been here 20 years, not like we launched yesterday.”

The food

With ice-packed seafood platters, crab cakes, a huge assortment of East and West Coast oysters, fish and chips and more, the menu seems to complement the decor at first glance. But that’s a little misleading. Balodimas is a talented chef who’s constructing his dishes with painstaking techniques and modern twists.

Consider the cold combo (\$18.95 per person), a seafood platter featuring sweet Spring Creek Oysters from Massachusetts, tiny bites of buttery king crab and crisp and briny little neck clams. It’s served with typical dips like a horseradish-spiked cocktail sauce and velvety smooth mustard-infused aioli, but there’s also an interesting Guinness stout granita included, which offers a

refreshing splash of chocolate, coffee and vinegar to the pristine shellfish.

The crispy snapper (\$27.95) is smothered in sauce made of pureed red Fresno chilis braised in olive oil spiked with Thai chilis, palm sugar, lime juice, cilantro, mint, ginger and soy. It’s fiery and bright, but the heat isn’t palate blowing. Though the meat is served on the bone and looks like a whole fish, the non-sauced side has been removed and used to make fish tacos (\$16.95). This keeps the

price down and still allows Balodimas to serve a juicy fillet on the bone. Piled underneath the snapper are crisp Kennebec french fries, which are the result of a painstaking five-day process of rinsing, brining, soaking, flash frying, drying and frying again.

Balodimas doesn’t always take the long and hard road. His crab cake (\$15.95) features fresh hand-picked crab meat (which he says “has a bunch of juicy fatty bits” left in), a little cracker meal and Old Bay seasoning. The result is a hefty but simple cake with punchy flavor and little filler. While I loved the crab cake, I encountered a bit

MINI-REVIEW Oyster Bah

1962 N. Halsted St.
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★★★★★
Heating up

RATINGS KEY ★★★★★ DEAD UPON ARRIVAL ★★★★★ PROCEED WITH CAUTION ★★★★★ GIVE IT SOME TIME ★★★★★ TAKE IT OR LEAVE IT ★★★★★ OFF TO A GOOD START ★★★★★ HEATING UP ★★★★★ ALREADY HOT



Clams, lobster and oysters at Oyster Bah



of inedible chewy cartilage. “Yeah, we’ve had a few complaints about that. I don’t want to minimize the guest’s concern. That’s important,” Balodimas said. “But, and maybe this is the chef in me talking, I would rather have the guest complain because of the by-product of having a fresh, flavorful product like the one we’re using than have a crab cake that’s dry and mealy.”

The swordfish schnitzel (\$20.95), which has since been taken off the menu, is also a departure from the usual. I was imagining a crispy, heavily breaded crust that you’d find with the traditional German preparation. Balodimas said he tried it that way but the crust overwhelmed the flavor of the fish. He regrouped and created a lighter crust. The swordfish’s

meatiness shone through, and I appreciated that, but the crust reminded me a bit of a battered potato pancake, which I wasn’t expecting.

Shrimp tempura (\$14.95) was also innovative. Instead of curled or butterflyed hunks of panko-studded meat, Balodimas and his team score the belly so the flesh, which is enrobed in a puffy tubular batter shape that reminds me of a mini corn dog, straightens out and cooks to a more tender consistency. The salty, spicy ginger-soy dipping sauce is also a nice antidote to all the aioli and cocktail sauce I’ve already encountered. My only quibble: A couple of the shrimp had a slightly soggy batter.

The drinks

All of the cocktails have nautical-themed names: The Cape, Nor’Easter and Oyster’s Bloody. The Perfect Storm (\$11) is a riff on a dark and stormy that adds falernum to the traditional mix of rum, ginger beer and lime. This addition lends a perfume of allspice, clove and vanilla, which makes the brew a bit headier. The Nor’Easter (\$12) features rye spiked with maple syrup, ginger beer, lime and the woodsy notes of cocktail bitters, a sweet and punchy mix that was the best of the drinks that I tried. Though I did not order wine, the list offers dozens of by-the-glass pours and is studded with nice oyster-friendly blends.

Dessert

My dining companion and I took bets as to whether or not there would be key lime pie on the dessert menu. I was kind of delighted that Balodimas and his crew left it off in favor of a perfect sugar-crusted slice of pie brimming with jammy blueberries and a monsoon-moist wedge of coconut cake (\$7.95 each).

Service

I don’t think I’ve ever had my water glass so well stocked. It felt like the service staff ran over and topped me off after every sip. Food arrived quickly, and servers cleared plates only after they confirmed we’d actually finished—something that happens less and less these days. Though Oyster Bah is a casual spot, there was a general level of attentiveness here that I rarely find at much higher priced fine-dining restaurants in Chicago.

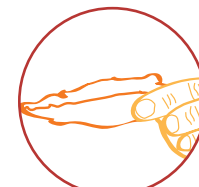
Bottom line

Oyster Bah is fairly unique. It feels like a casual fish shack but sells pristine seafood prepared with impeccable technique at reasonable prices. Oyster Bah is a classic, one that will likely join the pantheon of other long-lived Lettuce spots such as Cafe Ba-Ba-Reeba and Mon Ami Gabi.

MICHAEL NAGRANT IS A REDEYE CONTRIBUTOR. REPORTERS VISIT RESTAURANTS UNANNOUNCED, AND MEALS ARE PAID FOR BY REDEYE.



How to eat an oyster



THE PICKUP

Pick up the oyster with the smooth edge facing you, keeping it flat as to not spill the juice.



THE TIP-OFF

Tip it back and slurp.



THE CHEW

Chew a few times and swallow.



OPTIONAL

Dress up your oyster with a squeeze of lemon, a dash of cocktail or hot sauce or mignonette. Some like eating them on or with a saltine cracker. Though some use the tiny fork provided to ensure the meat is fully detached from the shell, that shouldn’t be necessary at any restaurant with a decent shucker.

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Barrel-aged gins
MICHAEL TERCHA/TRIBUNE



Gin again

How to drink those barrel-aged gins popping up everywhere

By Ari Bendersky | FOR CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Gin's reputation has certainly had a makeover of late.

Craft distillers such as Alameda, Calif.-based St. George Spirits and Evanston-based Few Spirits are including—in addition to the primary juniper berry—more interesting botanicals like Sichuan peppercorn, grapefruit peel, saffron or hibiscus flowers. And they're paying more attention to the spirit after the still. St. George and Few, along with such makers as Corsair and Ransom, have taken to barrel-aging gin.

Similar to the way whiskey and rum age in oak barrels, gin rests in barrels from three months up to a couple of years and takes on interesting characteristics from the wood like vanilla, cinnamon and caramel—often with bright citrus notes and a rounder mouthfeel than unaged gin. The ingredients can age in new oak barrels or used barrels that once held anything from bourbon to spiced rum to wine.

"The gin market has changed and grown quite a bit in the last five years," said Dave Smith, vice president and head distiller at St. George Spirits. "Gin allows small producers to put something in the market quickly and creatively express themselves. With aged gin, that's an extension on that creative drive."

St. George produces Dry Rye Reposado Gin with a base of rye whiskey that is blended with six botanicals including juniper, coriander, black peppercorn and grapefruit peel. It ages from 12 to 18 months in used grenache rosé and syrah barrels from nearby Blacksmith Cellars.

Few uses its own spent bourbon and rye barrels to produce its Barrel Gin, to get the texture of whiskey with the softness of gin.

Depending on the product, barrel-aged gin can have notes of winter baking spice, cinnamon, clove, vanilla and citrus, and it mixes well in a variety of cocktails. It's also a good stand-in for darker spirits.

"If a cocktail calls for either rum or gin, barrel-aged gin can be used in its place," said Will Atkinson, brand ambassador for Nashville's Corsair Distillery. "At home, I do a barrel-aged gin and soda on the rocks."

At its tasting room in Logan Square, Chicago Distilling Co. makes a variation on a gin and tonic that combines its barrel-finished Finn's Gin, comprising 100 percent Illinois corn and 11 botanicals, with elderflower tonic from Jack Rudy Cocktail Co. and soda water.

Some of the easiest ways to use barrel-aged gin in a cocktail are riffs on classics.

Consider a Moscow mule. Substitute barrel-aged gin for vodka and combine it with a spicy ginger beer from Gosling's or Fever Tree.

A negroni and a boulevardier, which use gin and bourbon, respectively, as their base spirits, become a new cocktail as barrel-aged gin mixes with equal parts Campari and sweet vermouth.

Old fashioned drinkers can swap 2 ounces of barrel-aged gin for rye or bourbon to produce a somewhat sweet and spicy drink.

"Gin is amazing because the rules are relatively forgiving," Few founder Paul Hietko said. "Barrel aging is becoming a trend because it's an area where people are exposed to something different. It's a good transition from a dark rum, whiskey or old tequila to tiptoe into the world of gin that's not so overwhelming."

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* = REDEYE RECOMMENDED WATCHING

For a full list of what's streaming and what's leaving Netflix in January 2016, visit redeyechicago.com/netflix



JAN. 13
* Parks and
Recreation:
Season 7

JAN. 1

2 Fast 2 Furious
Along Came Polly
Bring It On: Fight to the Finish
Bring It On: In It to Win It
Catwoman
Constantine
Forensic Files: Collection 2
The Good Road
House of Wax
Intolerable Cruelty
Journey to Le Mans
Loins of Punjab
Meet the Fockers
Meet the Parents
Nanny McPhee
* Pride and Prejudice (2005)
The Rundown
Shout Gladi Gladi
Smokin' Aces 2: Assassins' Ball
Something New
Stephen Fry Live: More Fool
Me
Swordfish
The Tale of Despereaux
Under Arrest: Season 1:
"Put Some Clothes On"
* We Need to Talk About Kevin
The Wedding Date
The Whole Ten Yards

JAN. 2

30 for 30: Four Falls of Buffalo
I'll Have What Phil's Having:
Season 1

JAN. 3

Sofia the First: Season 2

JAN. 4

Blunt Force Trauma
Training Day

JAN. 5

* It's Always Sunny in
Philadelphia: Season 10
* New Girl: Season 4

JAN. 6

Adult World
Dragons: Race to the Edge:
Season 2, *Netflix Original*
Tom Segura: Mostly Stories,
Netflix Original

JAN. 10

Dos Hermanos
El Hombre de al Lado
Esperando La Carroza
The Marziano Family
Un Oso Rojo

JAN. 11

Littlest Pet Shop: Season 4

JAN. 12

The Ladykillers

JAN. 14

The Testimony

JAN. 15

* Deglass: The Next Class:
Season 1, *Netflix Original*
* The Last Five Years
Moonwalkers
Occupied
The Overnight
* Sirens: Season 2

JAN. 16

Hyde Park on Hudson

JAN. 17

Z Nation: Season 2

BEFORE IT'S GONE

Nothing gold lasts forever.
So here are the titles
leaving Netflix in January
we think you should
watch before they expire.

JAN. 1

» A Clockwork Orange
» Almost Famous
» The Bourne Identity
» Coyote Ugly
» Gladiator
» The Graduate
» Jerry Maguire
» Mission: Impossible
» Rocky
» There Will Be Blood
» The Virgin Suicides
» Zoolander

JAN. 4

» The Nightmare Before
Christmas

JAN. 22

Sharknado 3

JAN. 23

* Chelsea Does, *Netflix Original*

JAN. 29

Ever After High: Dragon
Games, *Netflix Original*

JAN. 31

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movies

Totally random 2015 movie awards

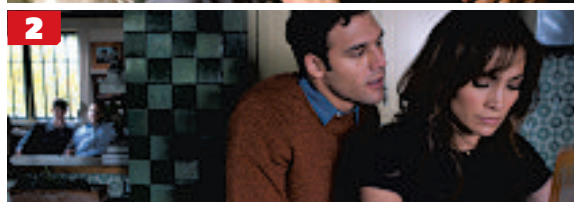
By Matt Pais | REDEYE

Soon the big shows (Oscars, Golden Globes, etc.) will give out the "legitimate" awards. Before then, let's look back on 2015 with some very RedEye-style honors.



1. WEIRDEST VOCAL PERFORMANCE
Blake Lively
The Age of Adaline

Don't try talking like you're very old. Just don't.



RUNNER-UP
Joseph Gordon-Levitt
The Walk

His French was good. His English with a French accent, not so much.

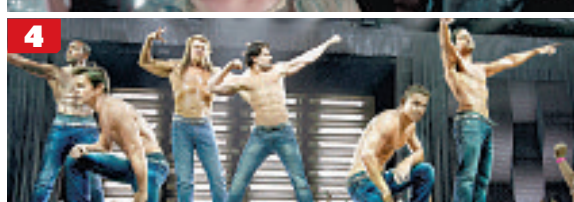


2. BEST USE OF COOKIES
The Boy Next Door

That line is already a classic.

3. PROOF THAT PETER PAN MOVIES NEED TO STOP
Pan

If this doesn't shut it down, I don't know what will.



4. BEST USE OF CHANNING TATUM
Magic Mike XXL

The movie's great; give it a chance.



5. WORST USE OF CHANNING TATUM
Jupiter Ascending

There is so much wrong with this movie and his (part-dog) character and just everything here.



6. MOST-DISCUSSED CHICAGO MOVIE
Chi-Raq

In first place by a mile.



7. BEST MOVIE BEING TALKED ABOUT EVERYWHERE
Spotlight

My No. 2 of the year. Might win Best Picture. I hope it does.



8. MOVIE THAT MADE ME CRY
Me and Earl and the Dying Girl

Hadn't happened in decades, so kind of a big deal.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 20 »

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movies



« CONTINUED FROM PAGE 18

9. MOVIE I CAN'T BELIEVE I LOVED
The Last Five Years
It's a musical. Normally that is a problem.

10. MOST UNDESERVED FAILURE
We Are Your Friends
I liked it. Did you?

11. BEST GUITAR PLAYING
Mad Max: Fury Road
Like there was any doubt.

12. MOVIE THAT WAS EXACTLY AS BAD AS EVERYONE EXPECTED
Entourage
Actually, it was worse.

13. STAR FINALLY GETTING THE ATTENTION SHE DESERVES
Brie Larson
"Room" is good. She's incredible in it.

14. MORE PROOF THAT KRISTEN STEWART IS TALENTED AND YOU NEED TO STOP COMPLAINING ABOUT HER
Clouds of Sils Maria
Watch it and you'll see.

15. STAR WHO DESERVES MORE ATTENTION FOR AN UNDERRATED PERFORMANCE
Jason Segel
Please catch up with "The End of the Tour." You won't regret it.

16. STARS YOU DIDN'T THINK COULD BE BAD TOGETHER
Jennifer Lawrence and Bradley Cooper
You didn't see "Serena," and you shouldn't. They're better in "Joy," but that's not good either. Rough.

17. WORST JULIANNE MOORE MOVIE
Freeheld
Would not have expected this to win the title.

RUNNER-UP
Seventh Son
Yep, this looked much worse. And was still very bad.

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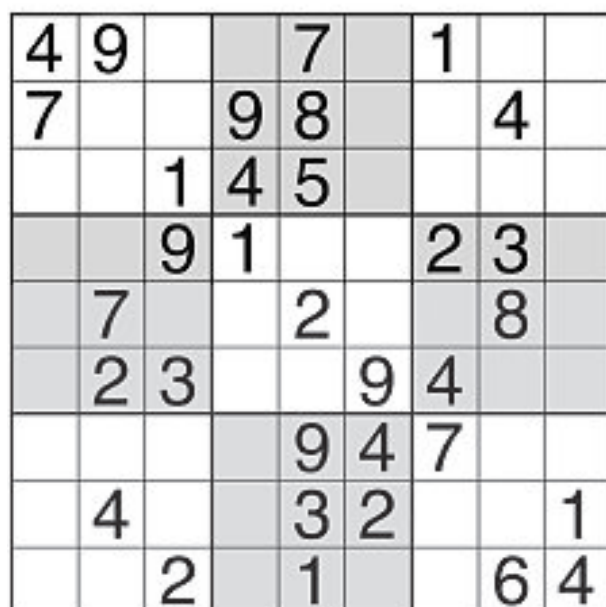
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TUESDAY'S SOLUTIONS

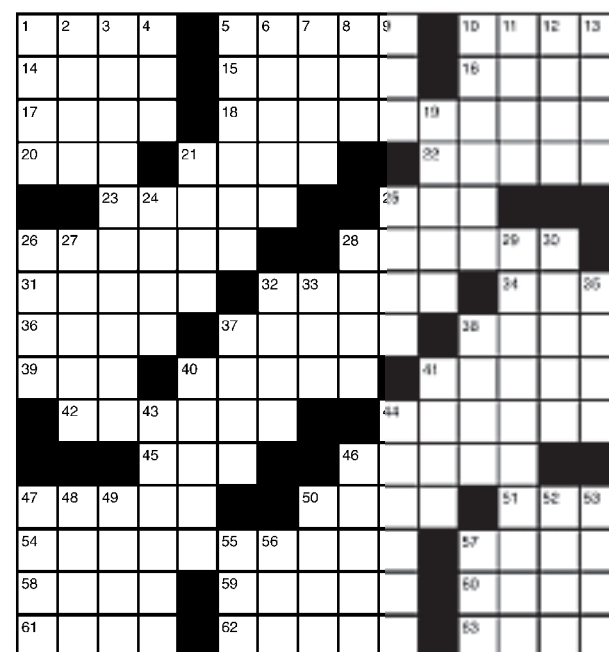


ACROSS

- 1 Japanese wrestling form
- 5 Relocates
- 10 _ dunk; sure thing
- 14 Candid
- 15 Spry
- 16 Too good _ true
- 17 A la _ topped with ice cream
- 18 Disloyal
- 20 At the _ of the day; ultimately
- 21 Sword fight
- 22 Breath fresheners
- 23 Fib tellers
- 25 Nov. follower
- 26 Slender
- 28 Talked wildly
- 31 Walkway
- 32 Door handles
- 34 Vigor
- 36 Pasture cries
- 37 Daring deeds
- 38 Long sandwich
- 39 Common street name
- 40 USNA freshman
- 41 Major river in central Africa
- 42 Antenna
- 44 Good-natured joking
- 45 Big game
- 46 3-line poem
- 47 Pod used to make chocolate
- 50 " _ Free"; film about a lioness
- 51 Performance
- 54 Intense joy
- 57 Depressed
- 58 "The Farmer in the _"
- 59 Window covering
- 60 Sandwiches, for short
- 61 Notice
- 62 Impudent
- 63 Fluid-filled sac

DOWN

- 1 Partial amount
- 2 Come _ find
- 3 Interfering
- 4 Afternoon hour



- 5 Ripen
- 6 Monsters
- 7 Lab bottle
- 8 Actor Wallace
- 9 _ up; arrange
- 10 No-nonsense
- 11 Fool
- 12 Border on
- 13 Clutter
- 19 Foreboding signs
- 21 Desert fruit
- 24 Misfortunes
- 25 Small amounts
- 26 Identical
- 27 Stringed instrument
- 28 Learn by _; memorize
- 29 In the long run
- 30 Funeral hymn
- 32 _ over; faint
- 33 Capture
- 35 Secure with an anchor
- 37 Harsh criticism
- 38 Sound the horn
- 40 Aviator
- 41 Abel's brother
- 43 Truly
- 44 Rubble of Bedrock
- 45 Hula _ toys that are twirled
- 47 Relinquish
- 48 Chopping tools
- 49 Actor Robert
- 50 Prejudice; slant
- 52 Incisions
- 53 SAT for one
- 55 Commercials
- 56 " _ la la _"
- 57 Brk's network



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THE DIGIT

\$571.42M

That's how much money "Star Wars: The Force Awakens" had made domestically at the box office as of Monday evening, according to **deadline.com**. The movie passed \$1 billion worldwide after the holiday weekend.



THE QUOTE

"I really hate it. I've never had a good one—everyone's chasing a good time, and it's always a disappointment. I plan on doing nothing and then if something lands in my lap ... but I always end up drunk and disappointed."

—Jennifer Lawrence, to Graham Norton on his BBC show, about New Year's Eve. Hey, we're with her. Except we're hosting a party at GMan Tavern, so y'all should be there. It's free.

GETTY IMAGES FILE

Soft kitty, warm kitty, big bag of money

"The Big Bang Theory" is dealing with a big headache about the song "Soft Kitty," which is now the center of a legal issue. According to **variety.com**, a lawsuit was filed Monday by the daughters of Edith Newlin, a New Hampshire teacher who wrote a poem about a "soft kitty" in the 1930s. They are claiming CBS and "Big Bang" used her lyrics without permission on the show and in merchandising for the show.



TERRENCE ANTONIO JAMES/TRIBUNE FILE

THE QUOTE

“THE DEVIL'S WORKING OVERTIME IN CHICAGO.”

—King Louie, to CNN, explaining the city's problem with gun violence. King Louie was shot seven times last week, including one to the head. He told CNN that three of the slugs are still with him, according to **rollingstone.com**.



GETTY IMAGES FILE

We're going to smell what he's cooking

Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson is headed back to Wrestlemania. Johnson posted on Instagram on Monday announcing his return, saying, "IT'S OFFICIAL: People's Champ is coming home to do 3 things with THE PEOPLE: Set an ALL-TIME attendance record, ELECTRIFY Dallas like never before & make all time #WRESTLEMANIA history." God bless him and his big, shiny bald dome.

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